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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DCHA/OFDA HUMANITARIAN UPDATE ON DJIBOUTI FLOODS

REF: A) DJIBOUTI 567; B) DJIBOUTI 540

Summary

1. (U) This is a USAID/DCHA/OFDA reporting cable, which provides analysis on the humanitarian situation in Djibouti, following OFDA Regional Advisor's April 15-18 assessment on the impact of last week's flash floods.

2. (U) In light of unusually heavy rains, resulting flooding and the inability of the host government to adequately respond, the US Ambassador declared a disaster in Djibouti on April 16 (reftel). Although estimated deaths are expected to be much higher, 51 people are officially reported dead, 23 injured, 37 people missing and 9,000 displaced to date. United Nations agencies and U.S. and French military forces have assisted in emergency relief efforts and are working with the Government of Djibouti (GODJ) to determine additional needs. The most pressing humanitarian concerns are focused on preventing widespread cholera, typhoid and other epidemics which followed similar flooding in 1994, and pre-positioned supplies will be critical.

3. (U) USAID has responded to the emergency through USAID/OFDA's provision of USD 100,000 in international disaster assistance funds to the UN World Health Organization (WHO) for emergency health kits for cholera and diarrhea. In addition, the U.S. military, in close collaboration with French military stationed in Djibouti, has provided 100 body bags, six water pumps and emergency water storage containers, and infrastructure repair on damaged roads and railroads. DCHA/OFDA and Embassy Djibouti believe that the USG response has thus far, reflected an appropriate level of emergency support to the flooding disaster in Djibouti. As additional needs emerge for mitigation, rehabilitation and recovery efforts, assistance from other donors should also be encouraged. End summary.

Flooding in Djibouti

4. (SBU) On April 13, a combination of torrential rains, strong winds and high tides caused flash flooding and the River Ambouli to burst its banks. Although the floods were sudden onset, the ground had already been saturated by watershed from heavy rains from the Ethiopian highlands. In the early hours of the morning, water levels rose several meters high within minutes in the Ambouli, Djebel, Gabode and Boulao quarters of the city. Since most of the population was sleeping and caught unprepared, flood waters rapidly swept away people and livestock. The French military responded quickly and were able to rescue hundreds of people stranded on rooftops. Although the GODJ has officially recovered 51 bodies, many bodies have not yet been recovered and the total estimated dead by the local population and French military is between 200-350.

5. (U) Heavy damage in several neighborhoods is evident, as flood waters destroyed structures and damaged contents of homes and businesses. Water and electricity supply has been cut in the most affected areas and damage to infrastructure includes breaks in the municipal water system, breaks in the railroad into the city and portions of roads and bridges leading to the city washed out. Efforts are underway to restore water and electricity, which is expected to be available soon. Rehabilitation work is also underway on the damaged roads and railroads, particularly as these represent the main trade routes between Djibouti-Ethiopia, and thus, the largest revenue generator.

6. (SBU) In the most affected areas, houses were completely destroyed, displacing roughly 9,000 people. The displaced have been temporarily sheltered in a primary school, but the GODJ reportedly want to resettle the displaced in new areas southwest of the city, where there are minimal or non-existent services. International agencies have expressed

concern about humanitarian implications if the GODJ moves forward without sufficient planning.

17. (SBU) Much of the city's poor population lives in densely populated shantytowns (reftel). Although water is beginning to recede, areas of the city with lower elevation have over a meter of water remaining. With the resulting clean water shortages, stagnant muddy water already contaminated by livestock carcasses and broken sewage pipes, and environmental damage from the flood, the threats of epidemic prone diseases such as cholera are of pressing concern, particularly since water and vector borne diseases are already endemic in Djibouti. (Note: the last major flood here occurred in 1994 and an estimated 120 people died. Following the 1994 floods, an outbreak of 8,000 cases of cholera and 32 deaths were registered. End note.)

18. (U) The UN World Health Organization (WHO) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) estimate that 10,000 people in affected flooded areas are particularly vulnerable to a cholera epidemic, based on current conditions and similarities to the 1994 floods. The floods have also disrupted provision of basic health services due to the total or partial destruction of main health care facilities in the area, notably the centers in Farahad, Ibrahim Balala, Arhiba and Amouli, which cover a population of 90,000 people. Medical equipment, drugs, cold chain and nutrition substitution stocks were lost. The MOH is heading a health emergency group, which includes the UN, to rapidly re-establish basic health services in the affected areas, install emergency surveillance for epidemic prone diseases and strengthen preparedness for the expected cholera outbreak. A response plan for cholera outbreaks has been developed by the MOH.

Emergency Response to Date

19. (SBU) Due to limited disaster response capacities within the country, a strongly coordinated multi-sectoral emergency response has not been evident outside of international organizations and the military. The strongest GODJ efforts have come from the MOH, who have developed emergency health response plans with WHO, repaired damaged health clinics and sent out mobile health teams for surveillance of epidemics. While the GODJ has clearly indicated that it will coordinate all relief efforts, international agencies are working hard to bolster these efforts. Emergency assistance provided to date by various agencies includes:

A) USAID: USD 100,000 provided by USAID/OFDA in response to the Ambassador's disaster declaration. Disaster funds will be immediately channeled through the WHO for emergency health kits. Emergency medical kits are expected to arrive by the end of the week from pre-positioned WHO stockpiles. Other development funds may be reprogrammed by USAID for mitigation and recovery efforts depending on the needs and priorities of the GODJ. [Note: other donors have not yet provided funding for relief efforts, however the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) conducted a rapid assessment of the situation last week and may consider providing assistance pending identified needs. End note.]

B) French Military: initial assistance included rescue of people stranded in the floods, utilizing heavy equipment to clear damaged railroads and roads, particularly along the Djibouti to Ethiopia road; removal of bodies and provision of body bags. Although the French military, assisted by the U.S. military, had begun working on repair of the city water supply system, the military has been pulled off working on the system and the Djiboutians have officially taken over repairs. Recently aired French TV documentaries over the alleged political assassination of French Judge Bernard Borrel in 1994 led to heightened political sensitivities (detailed septel), which has impacted some relief efforts underway by the military.

C) U.S. Military: in close coordination with the French military, the U.S. military has assisted in repairing damaged road, railroad and water supply infrastructure, provided 100 body bags, six water pumps and 350-gallon water storage containers, as well as sent medical teams out to sample the water and monitor health indicators.

D) UN Country Team: WHO, UNDP, UNICEF and WFP are coordinating closely to determine additional needs for emergency and recovery responses. The UN has requested disaster funds from their respective agency headquarters, which will be channeled into a coordinated response effort, addressing gaps not covered by other donors.

Comment

110. (SBU) Despite political undercurrents and the GODJ desire to be seen as the only one leading and responding in

the disaster efforts, stronger government capacity to manage disasters is needed since the country will always be vulnerable to climatic shocks.

11. (SBU) Djibouti's greatest challenge continues to be underlying poverty, which is compounded by a wide range of structural constraints, particularly its limited natural and human resources and arid climate. The economy remains fragile and UNDP estimates that Djibouti's per capita GDP has decreased in the past five years. Many of the overall problems that Djibouti faces stem from chronic poverty and vulnerability.

12. (SBU) DCHA/OFDA and Embassy Djibouti believe that the USG response has reflected an appropriate level of emergency support to the flooding disaster in Djibouti. As additional needs emerge for mitigation, rehabilitation and recovery efforts, assistance from other donors should be encouraged. USAID and Embassy Djibouti will continue to closely monitor the humanitarian situation. RAGSDALE